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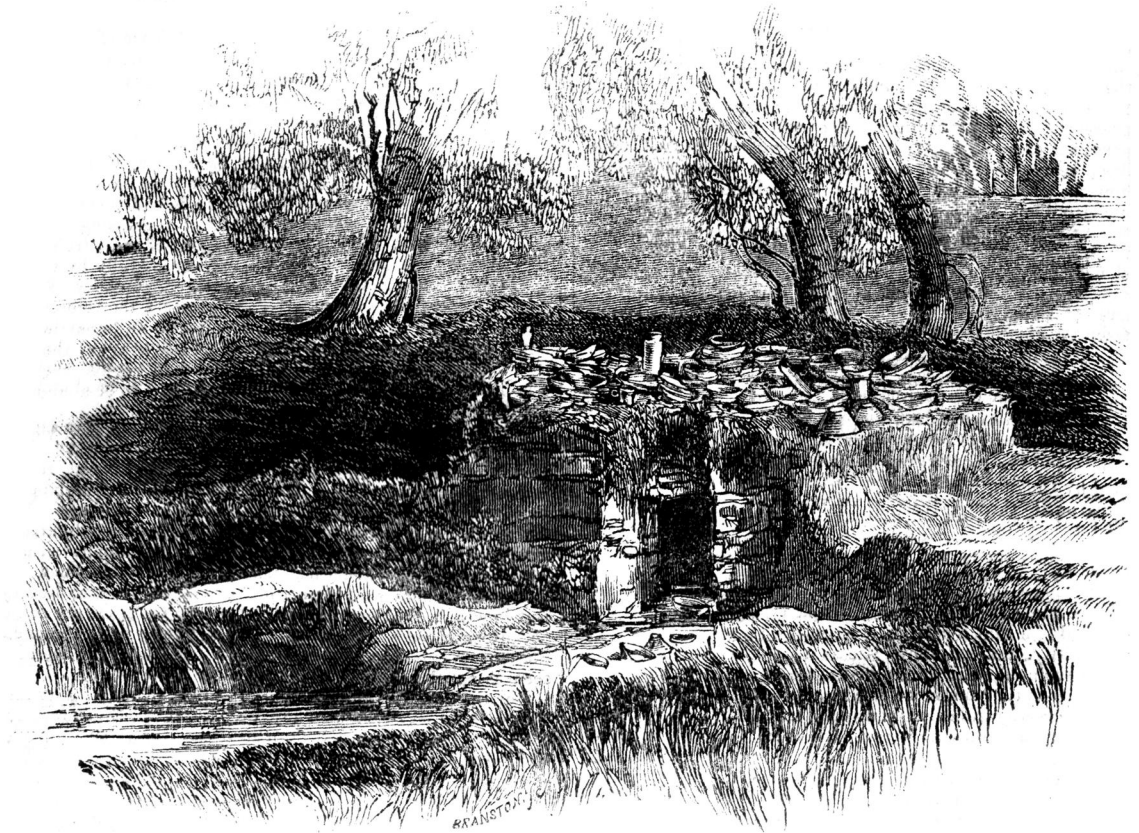
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SAINT SENAN'S WELL, COUNTY OF CLARE.

THERE are perhaps no objects in our own dear Ogygia, or Sacred Island, as it was also anciently called, which strike the minds of strangers with greater surprise, and excite them to more meditative reflection, than the holy wells which are so numerous in it, and the religious observances—to them so strange—which they see practised at them. By the devout of the reformed creeds, among such observers, these sacred fountains, with their adjacent and almost equally sacred trees, covered with bits of rag and other votive offerings of propitiation or gratitude to the presiding spirit of the spot, who is generally the patron saint of the district, are usually regarded with horror, as objects closely allied to pagan idolatry; and the religious devotions which they see practised at them excite only feelings of pity or contempt for what they consider the debased intellect of the votaries who frequent them. By the painter, poet, and the mere man of taste, however, they are viewed in a spirit of greater toleration, and with a more pleasing interest, particularly in the western portions of our island, where the wild scenery amid which they are generally to be met with, the symmetrical forms and often beautiful faces of the devotees, and the brilliant colours of their ancient national costumes, impart that interest and picturesqueness to the spectacle of which our own great national painter Burton has so admirably availed himself, and made familiar to the world, in his picture of the Blind Girl at the Holy Well. It

is, however, by the antiquary and the philosopher that they are viewed with the deepest interest, for to the one they present in all their vividness the still existing images of customs which originated in the earliest period of the history of our race, while to the other they supply the most touching evidences of the strength of that devotional instinct, however blind and misapplied, that humble faith in the existence and omnipotence of a Divine Intelligence, which are among the loftiest feelings of our nature, and which, when properly directed, must lead to the noblest results. In the minds of such philosophers, a contemplation of the usages to which we have referred will be apt to excite, not feelings of depression and despondency, but rather cheering anticipations of hope for the future prospects and ultimate happiness of the human race; and they who practise those usages will be regarded, even in their present meanness of garb, and concomitant vulgarity of habits, not as degraded outcasts from society, grovelling in the mire of ignorance and superstition, but as members of the universal human family, to be tolerated and cherished in all kindness; while, with respect to their peculiar devotion, for which so many censure them, it can still be said,

—“This may be superstition, weak or wild,
But even the faintest relics of a shrine
Of any worship, wake some thoughts divine.”

The Pagan origin of well-worship is now established beyond the possibility of contradiction, and its extreme antiquity is lost in the night of time. This has been satisfactorily shown in a very interesting essay, written with a view to the annihilation of its remains in Ireland, by a Roman Catholic clergyman of distinguished abilities and learning, the late Dr Charles O'Connor. This learned writer attributes its introduction into the British islands, and Ireland in particular, to the Phœnicians, and quotes several authorities to show that if it had not its origin with the Chaldeans, it can at least be traced as far back as to them, and that from Chaldea and Persia it passed into Arabia, thence into Egypt and Lybia, and lastly into Greece, Italy, Spain, and Ireland. In all these countries its vestiges are still to be found, but in none of them at this day so numerous as in Ireland; and it is remarkable that its usages are still identical in the far distant regions of the east with those in our own *Ultima Thule* of the west. This identity is clearly evidenced by Hanway, in his "Travels in Persia," in which he says, "We arrived at a desolate caravanserai, where we found nothing but water. I observed a tree with a number of rags to the branches. These were so many charms which passengers coming from Ghilan, a province remarkable for agues, had left there in a fond expectation of leaving their disease also in the same spot." Similar instances have been adduced by later travellers in the east, in reading whose descriptions we might almost suppose that they were depicting scenes in Ireland; and if all other evidences were wanting, these facts alone would be sufficient to establish the conclusion that the worship of fountains in Ireland was of Pagan origin. But we have in our ancient manuscripts the most satisfactory historical evidences to establish the fact. Thus, in Tirechan's Life of St Patrick, preserved in the Book of Armagh, and St Evin's Life as published by Colgan, it is stated, in detailing the progress of the Irish Apostle through Ireland, that he came to the fountain called Slán [that is, health], "because it was indicated to him that the Magi honoured this fountain, and made donations to it as gifts to God." This fountain was square, and there was a square stone in the mouth of it, and the water came over the stone, that is, through the interstices; and the Pagans told him that a certain Magus, who worshipped water as a divinity, and considered fire as a destroyer, when dying, made a shrine for his bones in the water beneath the stone, in order that they might be preserved. Patrick told the assembled congregation that it was not true that the king of the waters was in the fountain, and bade them raise up the stone, remarking that the bones of a man were not beneath it, but that he thought there was some gold and silver appearing through the joinings from their impious offerings; no such valuable offerings were, however, found; and Patrick consecrated the stone so raised to the true Divinity. It may not be unworthy of remark, that the well of Finnagh is still, as in the time of St Patrick, equally revered, though under a different name and with a different faith. It is now called Tober Brighde, or Bride's Well, having been subsequently dedicated to that saint as well as all the churches in the plain of Finnagh, and under this name the Druidical well of *Slán* is one of the most frequented and honoured in the whole of the county of Roscommon.

Several authorities of the same character as that now adduced may be found in the lives of other early Irish saints, but it is not necessary to our purpose to quote them.

Dr O'Connor shows from various evidences that on the firm establishment of Christianity in various parts of Europe the most severe ordinances of the church were promulgated against the continuance of well-worship in any form. "I have already stated," he observes, "that well-worshipping has been utterly abolished by the Catholic religion in Italy. The *Fontemala* exist no longer; the fountain of Egeria, which I have seen near Rome, is known only to the learned; and I have seen the common peasantry of Castel Gandolfo and Marino washing their linen in the sacred waters of the *Ferentine* Assemblies of Látium and of Rome."

In reference to its abolition in England, he adduces a canon made in the reign of Edgar, A.D. 960, by which it was ordained "that every priest do forbid the worship of fountains, and necromancy, and auguries, and enchantments, and sooth-sayings, and false worship, and legerdemain, which carry men into various impostures, and to groves and Ellens, and also many trees of divers sorts, and stones."

He also shows that similar ordinances appear in the Capitularies of Charlemagne, and that amongst the laws of the

reign of Eggbright, A.D. 740, the 148th canon is:—"If any man, following the custom of the Pagans, introduce diviners or sorcerers into his house, or attend the *lustrations* of Pagans, let him do penance for five years."

It may be asked, then, how has it happened that the veneration paid to wells has continued in Ireland even to the present day, and to this question it is not very easy to give a satisfactory answer. It may be remarked, however, that no evidences have yet been discovered to show that similar local ordinances were made to destroy their continuance in Ireland, and that it may hence be inferred that the attachment of the Irish people generally to their ancient usages in this instance, as well as in their funeral lamentations, May-fires, and many other ceremonies of a religious character derived from the same eastern and Pagan origin, was too strong even for the power of the clergy to eradicate or greatly diminish. Certain it is, that the pilgrimages to Lough Derg, which, there is every reason to believe, derive their origin from the same source, were abolished by an order of Pope Alexander VI, in 1497, and yet the people returned to them again, and they are at the present moment as numerous as ever, if not more so than ever. And, in like manner, the pilgrimages to wells, even where discountenanced and punished by the Roman Catholic clergy, as they are now in almost every part of Ireland, are still continued in secrecy, with a tenacity to ancient usages singularly characteristic of the Irish race, and which will ensure their existence for a considerable time longer.

St Benan's Well, which we have selected as a characteristic example of the holy wells of Ireland, is situated near the west bank of the Shannon, near Dunass, in the county of Clare. There is nothing very peculiar to distinguish this well from a thousand other fountains of the same kind, but the unusual character of the votive offerings made at it, which, as our engraving exhibits, consist chiefly of wooden bowls, tea-cups whole and broken, blacking-pots, and similar odd offerings of gratitude to St Seanan Liath, or Seanan the Hoary, the patron saint of the parish. P.

A FAIR-DAY IN NORMANDY,

BY MARTIN DOYLE.

HAVING a strong desire to procure some of the small compact Norman draught horses for my farm-work, I ventured last year to visit Normandy, for the purpose of making the desired selections. I took with me a young friend, who had been partly educated in France, as my interpreter with the French horse-dealers, and to arrange every particular for me during my intended hasty intercourse with the foreigners. But previously we went for passports to the office in Poland-street, where the Consul filled up the documents without ever looking at our faces, and I believe very incorrectly as to portraiture. "Your profession?" inquired he in French, as he was scribbling down the length of my nose, the colour of my hair and eyes, &c. "Homme de lettres," responded my companion for me. I nodded my head in acquiescence, without knowing anything about the matter; but I was quite satisfied when my friend explained it afterwards to me, and assured me that Lord Brougham, when Lord Chancellor, had from sheer modesty sunk his rank and other artificial honours on going to Paris, and simply designated himself as "Avocat, et homme de lettres." "Does not all the world," said my companion, "know perfectly well that you are, in the first place, one of the props of the Irish Penny Journal?" "Enough," said I, somewhat tickled by the reference to Lord Brougham; "be it as you please—though I think that, as a farmer going to France merely to buy horses, I might as well have been wrotten down under the useful character of 'agriculturist.'" My passport, however, was by this time in my pocket, and any alteration in it was out of the question.

I had ascertained that a fair would be held on a particular day at Falaise, and having time enough to make a long journey by land, and much curiosity to see Calais, I determined to go there: we reached that port early in the day.

"Well, then, I am in France," said I, as we landed from the steamer on the pier; "here I am, actually on the Continent, looking at French soldiers, who won't shoot me, stab me, nor take me prisoner, and on fishwomen, with kerchiefs tastily arranged on their heads, large ear-rings, and brown faces, and hearing a language altogether strange to me." After staring about me there for half a day, and eating a very nice dinner in a very grand hotel, fitted up as if there was never